

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 001236

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

PACFLEET FOR ADM ROUGHEAD
PACOM FOR FPA HUSO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/01/2016

TAGS: [OVIP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF PACFLT COMMANDER ADM
ROUGHEAD

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (a and d)

1. (C) Gary, your trip to Bangkok will take place as Prime Minister Thaksin faces his most serious political crisis since taking office. Speculation about the future of his government will likely arise during all of your meetings. We are asking all U.S. visitors meeting with Thai officials to urge respect for the democratic process and to stress the importance of showing restraint and using peaceful methods. Your visit remains a terrific opportunity to improve our links with the Royal Thai Navy. Jonathan Greenert is here now and the Thai are excited about the possibility of more USN ship visits, possibly to include the USS Abraham Lincoln Battle Group in April. Our military-to-military relationship is strong. Nonetheless, our relationship with the Royal Thai Navy could be improved. We hope during your stay that you will be able to promote several issues such as our desire for better cooperation with Thailand in maritime security as well as flag key benefits of U.S.-Thai cooperation such as the growing professionalism within Thai Naval Special Forces.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION

2. (C) In 2001, PM Thaksin Shinawatra became the first democratically elected civilian Prime Minister to win an outright majority in the Thai Parliament. He has dominated the political scene in ways never seen before. He has used Constitutional changes implemented in 1997 to take control of most of the major government institutions -- including ones initially designed to be independent. Until recently, despite an authoritarian streak, he has deftly mixed populist measures such as virtually free health care with a pro-business economic policy in a fashion that allowed his Thai Rak Thai (Thais loving Thais) political party to run the country. In February 2005, Thai Rak Thai won 375 of the 500 seats in Parliament. Thaksin comes from a prosperous Sino-Thai family in Thailand's second largest city, Chiang Mai, and placed first in his class at the National Police Academy. He spent several years studying in the United States and considers himself a friend of the President. After a few years with the police, he left government service to run the family business (Shinawatra Corporation, or Shin Corp), which he turned into Thailand's largest telecom company, making himself a multi-billionaire.

3. (C) The Thai political system is presently working through its biggest crisis since 1992. Tens of thousands have participated in peaceful rallies protesting government corruption and Thaksin's recent tax-free sale of Shin Corp to Singapore. In an effort to work his way out of the current predicament, Thaksin dissolved parliament and called snap elections nominally set for April 2. The opposition has announced it will boycott the elections, a move that could force an impasse taking Thai politics into uncharted Constitutional territory. At this point, we believe there is a reasonably good chance that the Thai will work through this problem peacefully, and in a way that will generally be considered legitimate here. Most of our contacts express confidence that troops will remain in the barracks. Nonetheless, given the Thai military's history of involvement in politics, we are monitoring the situation closely. We are urging the police and military to use restraint against peaceful demonstrators and not to intervene illegally in the situation. We wish to avoid being seen as taking sides.

THE OVERALL SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

4. (C) The U.S.-Thai security relationship is based on over 50 years of close cooperation. Thai soldiers, sailors and airmen participated in the Korean and Vietnamese Conflicts and Thai peacekeepers served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thailand is the fourth largest participant in the U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. Thailand's willingness to allow the United States to use Utapao Naval Air Station as the hub for our regional tsunami assistance program was key to making Operation Unified Assistance a success. In your meetings with Thai officials, you will want to note the overall strength of the relationship -- highlighting our history and underscoring the

importance of our tsunami cooperation, exercise program, increased tempo of USN ship visits, and cooperation in the War on Terrorism.

THE NAVAL RELATIONSHIP

15. (C) While our overall relationship with the Thai military is good, our links with the Royal Thai Navy (RTN) are not as strong as those with the Royal Thai Army or Air Force. The RTN is smaller than the other services and tends to be less willing to be open with U.S. counterparts. This has not been the case historically, and we need to work to reverse the trend. Recently, the Chinese have improved their ties to the RTN as evidenced by the first PLA Navy ship visit to Phuket, a joint SAR exercise in the Andaman Sea, and sales to Thailand of Chinese equipment. Likewise, the RTN has been developing a closer relationship with the Indian Navy and has conducted some exercises with the Indians.

16. (C) In addition to supporting our annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise with Thailand, JUSMAGTHAI has worked closely with RTN Special Warfare units to increase their capacity. USN SEALs have helped to provide their Thai counterparts with some impressive capabilities. For instance, Thai SEALs regularly conduct exercises aimed at protecting oil and gas platforms in the Gulf of Thailand. This NSW relationship was graphically demonstrated during the tsunami response when USN and RTN SEALs rapidly deployed to

SIPDIS

Phuket to assist in the recovery efforts. The Prime Minister was photographed in a recovery boat manned by the SEALs. Despite their improved professionalism, the Thai SEALs are not well-supported by senior RTN officials. In your meetings with your counterparts, you may wish to discuss the importance of the SEALs and make mention of their capabilities.

REGIONAL MARITIME SECURITY

17. (C) A key U.S. objective in the region is to improve Maritime Security. We are working closely with PACOM to encourage Thailand and others to support the Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI). In November, during the U.S.-Thailand Strategic Dialogue, LTG Kemarat Kanchanawat, the Royal Thai Supreme Command (RTSC) Joint Operations Director, discussed a "Combined Maritime Patrol" architecture for the Strait of Malacca that would involve Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. In a January 24 meeting with the Ambassador, RTN CINC ADM Satirapan Keyanon indicated that the RTN was leery of this Combined Maritime Patrol architecture, suggesting that Kemarat was trying to commit the RTN budget to the proposal without proper authority. During your meetings with RTN officers, you may wish to probe for a clearer understanding of how the Thai Navy views its responsibilities to safeguard waters in the region. On a related topic, RTN officials are skeptical of the Malaysian sponsored "Eyes in the Sky" program. Thailand does not plan to actively participate for at least a year due to not having enough aircraft to sustain long-term patrolling.

UTAPAO UPGRADES

18. (C) Utapao NAS has been designated by PACOM as the most important Cooperative Security Location (CSL) in the Asia Pacific Region. While we avoid using the term "CSL" with the Thai due to their sensitivities about bases, Utapao remains vital to our interests in the region. Thai and U.S. officials in-country concur that Utapao is due for significant safety upgrades in order to continue to meet our needs. Although Utapao is a RTN facility, PACAF is the executive agent exploring whether the United States can assist in providing safety upgrades there. Thai military officials still await the results of a PACAF assessment of Utapao which took place in September. Royal Thai Navy officials recently indicated to the Ambassador that they seek radar upgrades at Utapao in addition to fire safety and other improvements.

THE ROLE OF CHINA AND INDIA IN THE REGION

19. (C) Southeast Asia continues to feel the rising influence of China and India. While emphasizing the vital role of the U.S. in the region -- and Thailand's desire to intensify U.S. engagement -- Thai leaders also focus on developing stronger relations with the two regional powers. The Thai view both countries as sources of unlimited consumer demand and hope to conclude Free Trade Agreements with both nations. Given your close interest in those countries, it would be worthwhile for you to exchange views on the future roles of India and China.

COUNTERTERRORISM AND SOUTHERN THAILAND

110. (C) Until recently, Prime Minister Thaksin's biggest domestic challenge was the unsettled security situation in the far southern part of the country. Southern Thailand, in particular the southernmost Muslim majority provinces of

Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, has experienced episodic violence since it was incorporated into the Siamese Kingdom in 1902. However, since January 2004, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the level of violence. Press reports indicate that over 1,000 persons have been killed either by militants or by security forces during this period. Local Muslim separatist militants have attacked symbols of Thai and Buddhist authority, civilians, and local citizens suspected of collaborating with the Government. There continue to be daily incidents of violence. In March 2005, Thaksin appointed a National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) headed by highly respected former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun to look for alternative solutions to the long-running insurgency. The NRC is expected to present its findings sometime this month.

11. (C) The RTN does not play a role in addressing the situation in the South. Nonetheless, Thai officials may ask you for U.S. equipment and technology such as UAVs. We suggest you be non-committal. There are widely circulated rumors among ethnic Malay Muslims that the U.S. has fomented the violence in the South in order to justify a U.S. security presence there. This has made the RTG very sensitive about any visible U.S. assistance aimed at the South. You should be aware of these concerns when discussing offers of possible U.S. assistance.

HARRIERES

12. (C) The RTN, like the other services, does not have a long-range vision of what Thailand's maritime security needs are, what threats Thailand might need to counter, or what equipment it should procure. As a result, its inventory includes a wide variety of equipment of questionable utility.

One example is its VSTOL Carrier, the Chakri Naruebet. Thailand procured the carrier from Spain and, at the same time, bought eight used AV-8 Harriers. These aircraft are no longer airworthy. For several years, we have been urging the Thai to use their carrier as a helicopter platform. A number of RTN officers agree and have supported more training for helo ops from the Chakri Naruebet. However, another faction within the RTN continues to ask us for more Harriers. If you are asked for AV-8's, you may wish to underscore that we have no surplus Harriers due to their use elsewhere and urge the Thai to continue to develop their carrier as a helicopter platform.

NAVAL HAWK (MH-60S) HELICOPTER

13. (C) The RTN has expressed an interest in increasing the size of its helicopter force. One option is to purchase four of the new Sikorsky MH-60S Naval Hawk. With its design emphasis on multi-mission capabilities, most particularly logistics, SAR and light attack, coupled with the fact that it is marinized for shipboard operations, make this aircraft ideal for the roles and missions of the RTN. Although the RTN wants the MH-60S, it has been experiencing sticker shock and has had difficulty getting the funding required through the budgetary process. You may wish to ask your interlocutors whether the RTN is willing to push for the funding required to purchase four aircraft as planned.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR VISIT

14. (U) Have a safe trip. I look forward to catching up and giving you an update on the political situation.
BOYCE